

Lent 3 / 1st Sunday of Covid 19

Exodus 17.1-7 Faith and Pandemic

Exodus 17.1-7

17 All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ²Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" ⁴So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Message

Lent 3

Faith and Pandemic

Intro:

I began adult life in social sciences at end of 1970s.

Later I moved to Biblical Studies, Theology and then eventually became a pastor.

I learned that modern social sciences devise new words to describe what the Bible pointed to thousands of years ago.

The readings we had today from Exodus and John's Gospel are good examples of this.

They come to us in Lent because they are mirrors of our selves.

Mirrors are useful if you want to reflect for the purpose of changing through repenting and believing.

The Book of Exodus is a hall of mirrors to any group of people on a faith journey, like a church?

- There is a salvation experience and then 40 years of working out how to be a saved people.
- There is liberation from slavery and then 40 years of learning how to be a free people
- There is deliverance from abuse under false gods and then 40 years of learning how to obey God with a human pastor.
- There is a process of transition from one way of life and a founding pastor to a new way of life with a second pastor.
 - Moses to Joshua.

The story we heard this morning from Exodus 17 is a typical example of all this

Story

A big word social psychologists use to describe what people want most of the time is 'Homeostasis'. It's what we want in our physical bodies as a relatively stable equilibrium between interdependent elements be they the physical organs in our body or the people, political parties, racial groups, economic forces in a social system.

The simple words for homeostasis are stability, balance and calm. When things are balanced, stable and calm we know what to expect and that helps most people relax. I say 'most people' because some people find it very hard to relax and are typically anxious even when all is calm.

So this morning we see Moses and the pilgrim people living as nomads in the wilderness dry places with their animals. They run into one of the many high stress moments of the Exodus.

All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink

The 'Wilderness of Sin' is a proper name and not what we think of as falling short of God's glory.

They find themselves without water.

- 4 days without water and we die.
- Time was running out.
- People got thirsty, they got anxious, they got angry.

This is how revolutions happen.

It's why French law requires there to always be bread available in every town. In 1789 it was learned that no bread = angry people = revolution with all consequences there of. Therefore bread must be available to prevent it happening again.

Now here is the first mystery: Did God not know this?

It says in v1 that

The people of Israel moved on from the Wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim

Q How could they be led by God and have landed in a place without water?

A That is a valid question is it not? Either

- God had it wrong that day?
or
- God was trying to kill them?
or
- This was a test of faith?
or
- Moses has messed up?
or....?

Exodus 17:1-4

All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" ⁴ So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me."

Without water we lose homeostasis individually and social and slide into crisis mode.

We read on

² **Therefore** the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."

Well that's logical isn't it?

Take it up with administration, management or leadership. Let them know that you are unhappy.

Q But do you notice something strange here?

A They did not take it up with God who had been their saving power thus far and is described here as leading them. How come?

This is where we see something of Moses as a Good Shepherd.

A bad shepherd would give up and run.

“The sheep are revolting. I am worth more than this. Why should I take this? I am fed up with being bitten. God I quit!”

At times Moses feels this in the journeys. He is in among the people not in the top floor of a corporate tower. He is also feeling the thirst. He could be stoned by an angry mob.

First Moses turns to the people:

And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?”³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”

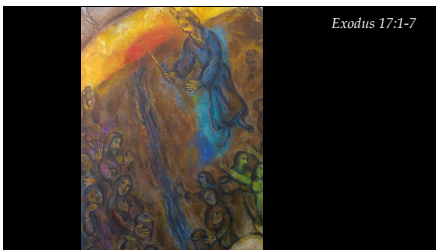
He tries to turn their attention to the LORD who is the biggest player in the drama.

It is the LORD who rescues, provides and leads them. This gets him no where.

So then Moses does what he must do as the one between God and the People:

⁴ So Moses cried to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

In response to this the Lord gives instructions



⁵ And the LORD said to Moses, “Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

So water is provided, people drink, anxiety drops, everyone is happy, until next time.

In the last line we hear Moses’ own reflection on the whole experience answering the question: What was this all about? Why did God lead us into this?

they tested the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

Reflection

Q Can we recognize ourselves in this story?

The value of crisis and the chaos it brings is that it reveals what is actually there all the time.

Story of fire alarm in school boarding house. What did people carry in their hands when they fled?

What were the treasures to grab?

How did people behave in critical moment?

Lesson: In the coming weeks watch.

In any crisis the fearful start yelling - often telling everyone else what should happen.

As a leader I listen to what people say but the problem is that the first people to speak are the anxious and fear is not a good adviser.

More than that my role is to lead a people in faith not fear.

As Moses experienced, the fearful start yelling at the leadership.

In extreme cases, as with Moses, the fearful attack their leaders like a drowning person in panic.

To help the faithful lovingly help the fearful let's note a few things.

The engine of fear is doubt, or double-mindedness - the inability to make a decision in peace.

Indecision can be seen in what is described as 'fusion' (ie looking and responding to everyone else without making a decision or taking a stance one self)

Taking in information is important but in itself it does not automatically provide courage or wisdom. It can be seen in accusation of others, As with Moses.

Jesus had this with the storm in the boat. "Don't you care we are drowning? How can you sleep?" Was Jesus an uncaring bad leader or were his friends in panic?

It can be heard in projection when others are plastered with accusations generated by fear.

I meet this when people tell me what I am thinking and why I do things. It's amazing but then quite common in BBC news reporting.

Towards faith, the way of wisdom is to go to the greatest reality involved; God.

Moses got there in v.4 "and Moses cried to the LORD."

That is the wisdom we follow as people of faith:

- Go to the biggest rock.
- Go to the source of life.
- Go to the one in whom we are baptized.
- Go to the one in whom we live, and move and have our being.

The desert journey is remembered by Jeremiah as a honeymoon.¹

God was teaching this to his people and Moses. That was the project and it involves moments of crisis.

There may be cool-headed pragmatists here as well.

Their analysis is that it's all about water.

Just get the water and all will be well. Moses: Start drilling! Fix the problem and everyone can relax.

No, the crisis was the lesson.

Simply solving the crisis of the day being water of Covid-19 is not THE issue.

The Issue is relationship.

Jesus spoke about this often such as when asked why bad things happened to innocent people.

It's a lesson we need reinforcing again and again. Covid-19 is another such moment of opportunity.

¹ Jeremiah 2.2b,3 "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. ³ Israel was holy to the LORD, the first fruits of his harvest."

It's an exercise in faith over fear, Obedience over rebellion, peace over panic, love, power and a sound mind over crippling anxiety.

Now a few words about civil authorities:

The Christian view on government is that its there to promote good and restrain evil.

In that we are to respect them and cooperate.

We are to pray for them to promote good and restrain evil.

I believe the government here is doing its job in relation to Covid-19.

BUT it tends to happen, even with CU and CDA, (Christian political parties in government) in frame within a secular box.

That secular box has no place for God. God is excluded from consideration. The issues are reduced to numbers that every educated Dutch person can understand.

That's OK. We live as exiles among the nations. We can process numbers.

HOWEVER, We need to live with God in our frame or more correctly, with reference to God who does NOT fit into any frame.

As people with faith in God as the biggest living reality living among non-believers in a time of crisis and fear.

- We are people of Prudence and Faith. Yes I wash hands often but my life is in God.
- We live with Wisdom and Risk. Life means risk, it cannot be avoided and we seek Wisdom is that. How do you do dangerous things well?
- We live safely but with integrity in who we are.

CONCLUSION

- Do NOT be afraid!
- Look to God as our life before you look to people eg Pastor.
 - That is what the conversation with the woman was all about
- Cooperate with the government
- Live wisely.